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AUTHOR Canna, Debra S.
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ABSTRACT

Studies on the impact of experience-based cooperative education on career development, maturity, and retention were reviewed to determine if high school students were prepared to successfully enter the world of work. Studies comparing cooperative and non-cooperative education in terms of career attitudes and maturity indicated that cooperative education students appear to be superior. Cooperative education has also shown its effect on students' personal growth and maturity. One evaluation showed more negative results, including varied attainment of positive work habits and attitudes as well as career decision-making skills by experience-based career education students. In another study, no evidence of program effectiveness in career knowledge and career maturity program components was found. More encouraging results from studies supporting cooperative education were positive student and community attitudes toward experience-based career education, improved student attitudes toward education, and substantial career education gains for student participants. Findings from studies also seemed to indicate that cooperative education students placed a higher priority on career establishment than did non-cooperative education students. The few studies on career retention that have already been conducted showed that cooperative education graduates remained in, or were committed to, careers they explored through experience-based career education. (YLB)

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EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATION ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' CAREER CHOICE: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.

Debra S. Canna

While the growth of Cooperative Education at secondary schools and institutions of higher learning has been rapid, concomitant growth of systematic program evaluation and impact studies has been less than satisfactory. Previous studies have suggested the value of Cooperative Education in terms of its relevance, not its long term effect on participants' career selection and occupational success. Public education is being scrutinized as to its cost-effectiveness; and vocational funding is seen as an expendable item in the overall budget. Experienced-based career education programs may be phased out to make way for the "back to basics" curriculum. To continue or increase present funding, legislators need to be made aware of the value of Cooperative Education in training today's youth to become productive members of society.

Much of the current research has been conducted at the post-secondary level. The lack of studies dealing with the high school population has not aided school administrators in their curriculum decisions. Evidence needs to be found to support the view that students who participate in an experienced-based cooperative education program in high school will be prepared to successfully enter the world of work.

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Most observers are agreed on the value of relating education to employment. It adds a dimension of reality to the educational process through student exposure to the real world, and an occupational dimension through the development of career interests and orientation to the work environment (Tyler, 1971). Cooperative Education Programs give high school students a chance to combine academic skills with work experience. For many, co-op arrangements, which are multiplying rapidly nationwide, become stepping-stones to life-long careers. Moreover, on-the-job training often gives students a greater resolve toward their classwork (U.S.News, 1981).

Public schools in this country have been relating the educational experience to employment since 1906, when the city of Cincinnati, Ohio, organized the first formal work-experience cooperative education program (Knowles, 1971). Over the ensuing years, however, the gap between the formal educational process and work experience continued to widen for a number of reasons, among them changes in public attitudes toward the employment of children and youth, the nation's vanishing economic frontiers, and a more than ample adult labor supply (Ivens & Runge, 1951).

In more recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the development of a closer relationship between schools and the work environment. The isolation of youth in school classrooms, away from the important economic institutions

of the community, has been described as depriving the young of opportunities to learn how to accept responsibility and be a part of the adult society (Bronfenbrenner, 1970,1973; Coleman, 1972,1973). After reviewing the literature on this problem, a federal interagency panel recently recommended that experiments be conducted to determine whether actual experience in a real working situation promotes social and emotional development and that such research be initiated to help establish the efficacy and usefulness of work experience in a variety of settings as an alternative means of preparing youth for adulthood (Searcy, 1973).

Working is an increasingly important focus of the high school experience as reflected by the continued popularity of cooperative education and work experience programs (Bailey & Stadt, 1973). Delaney (1975) has noted the growth of youth work experience linked with education since the passage of the National Vocational Educational Act of 1963. Despite the increased attention to student work experiences, few studies have examined the impact of work on career development (Dewis& Ace, 1973)

Studies comparing co-op versus non-co-op in terms of career attitudes and maturity, indicate cooperative education students appear to be a superior group of students. A recent study comparing cooperative and non-cooperative education students across time on several variables related to career maturity, career choice, and major certainty, showed that co-op students rate higher in career maturity, career planning, and problem-solving abilities (Martello & Shelton, 1981).

Cooperative Education has also shown its effect on students' personal growth and maturity. For example, Wilson (1974) reports co-op students tend to view career development with increasing significance across time and show less career uncertainty than non-co-ops; indeed, "greater educational change" was associated with the co-op experience.

Not all research indicates such positive results. Neely (1980) conducted a third party evaluation of the State Fair Community College Experienced-Based Career Education (EBCE) program's third and final year. Forty-one tenth and eleventh grade students participated in the program and were matched with similar nonparticipating control groups. The evaluation concluded that program objectives aimed at promoting community knowledge of the program, increasing students' career exploration opportunities, integrating academic and vocational education, and encouraging development of students' attitudes and skills relative to a changing society, generally were met. Although EBCE students met the objectives of maintaining an acceptable level of performance in academic skills, they varied in attaining the objectives related to acquiring positive work habits, positive attitudes, and career decision-making skills; commitment to career development activities; increase of career skills; and knowledge of career options. The evaluator recommended follow-up studies of both EBCE and control students five and ten years after participation to better measure students' work habits.

The final evaluation report on Rhode Island's Experienced-Based Career Education Project concurs with the previous study. The results indicated that EBCE students showed no significant increase in career maturity, career knowledge, learning attitudes, or self concept. The data collected was gathered from opinion surveys.

Another EBCE Program from St. Charles Parish Schools, Luling, Louisiana, (1978), provides secondary school students with cognitive skills, career experiences, and personal perspectives which aid in selection and pursuit of adult life goals. Third-party evaluation results included the following: (1) In career maturity there was no evidence of significant development when the performance of the experimental and control groups was compared. These results do not support program effectiveness in the career knowledge or career maturity program components. (2) Data analysis showed some support for development in attitudes toward learning environment and in self-concept. (3) Hypotheses about growth within the experimental group in the basic skills area were proven.

In a more positive vein were the student outcome objectives and process objectives that were the focus of the Portland EBCE project evaluation (1977). The Portland EBCE project followed the EBCEmodel developed by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, based on experiential learning with career and academic experiences in the community. A total of thirty-three juniors and seniors participated in the program. These students were pre- and postested

in the areas of basic academic skills, career development, and life skills. Process objectives were evaluated using document review and observation, interviews with students and staff, and opinion and attitude questionnaires administered to parents and and resource persons. All student outcome objectives were achieved as were all process objectives, and the majority of attitudes expressed toward EBCE program were positive.

The Appalachian Maryland EBCE Project Evaluation is one of the strongest and best known studies supporting cooperative education (Stead, 1977). Experimental and control students were pre- and posttested with the Career Maturity Inventory and the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal, in combination with a Student Profile Sheet. Some of the major conclusions were that (1) the support of local constituents and community for EBCE was unequivocally strong and impressive; (2) EBCE students demonstrated exemplary academic progress, and their attitudes towards education generally improved as a result of participating in the program; and (3) in terms of career skills and career decision-making, the EBCE students demonstrated substantial career education gains after participating in the project. In general the findings of this study are in accord with previous studies reported in the literature, but too numerous to cite here. Wilson (1974) suggests co-op students place a higher priority on career establishment, while a study of co-op alumni suggests participation in cooperative education increased undergraduates perception of career preparedness (Darcy, 1982).

A recent study by Gade and Peterson (1980) contributes additional information about the relationship of working to socioeconomic status, school achievement, and activity, and self-esteem. Students who are employed in cooperative education programs seem to perform as well or better on these indicators than nonworking students. Additional research on the longitudinal effects of working over the school years seems needed as well as additional study of student job satisfaction and self-esteem.

Another approach to study the effectiveness of Cooperative Education programs is to conduct a follow-up study of students for a period of years in order to see how many have remained in the occupations for which they were trained (Ivins & Runge, 1951). They should be checked also to find out how many were able to advance and progress in the career selected. Not many studies of this nature have been made. The proportion of students remaining in the occupation for which they were trained varies from only a few to more than 50%. A sample study from Tennessee Diversified Occupations student-learners who completed training during the period 1944-47, showed 59.8% of the graduates employed in occupations for which they were trained or allied occupations (Ivins & Runge, 1951).

Recent studies have been concerned with post-secondary cooperative education follow-up, but a minority are designed to evaluate the career retention of high school cooperative education graduates. Legg (1981) presents the second stage of a longitudinal follow-up of 1973-74 Kansas vocational graduates.

Graduates of secondary schools, area voc-tech schools, and post-secondary community colleges were given questionnaires on their current vocational status. For all completers, training-related employment and the training related field (schooling or employment) retention was a consistent percent in the two follow-ups. Also for both, completers from post-secondary training sources had a consistently higher placement percentage than completers from secondary training sources.

DeLaurentis (1980) found similar results in his study of apprenticeships in high school. The program's long term effects were that the employers strongly supported the program, and students remained, for the most part, in the same career area they trained for in school.

Greenville County Schools in South Carolina sponsored a demonstration experienced-based career education project implemented to provide realistic career information to high school students (1977-79). The project was intended to provide the EBCE students with community-based career experiences structured to reinforce academic instruction, and combined community work experiences in relation to the student's own interests, aptitudes, and abilities. The interim report indicated a very favorable response to the EBCE program from students, parents, and the community. The three year follow-up study praised the exemplary project as it was accepted by the state board of education as a state model that renders participants eligible for academic credit. The final report also showed

the success of the project by the high proportion (81%) of graduates employed or indicating further educational commitment to careers they explored during the EBCE program.

As was evident in the review of literature, few studies have been conducted to accurately judge the impact of cooperative education on career development, maturity, and retention. More research is needed to fill the void in the knowledge base of relating educational experiences to the world of work. Most of the studies cited seem to support experiential learning with career and academic experiences in the community as viable alternatives to teach young people to accept responsibility to enter the adult working society.

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